Clonidine

This sheet is about exposure to clonidine in pregnancy and while breastfeeding. This information is based on published research studies. It should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare provider.

What is clonidine?

Clonidine is a medication that has been used to treat high blood pressure, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), bipolar disorder, and pain. Some brand names include Catapres®, Duraclon®, and Kapvay®. Clonidine is sometimes used in combination with other medications for the management of opioid withdrawal.

Sometimes when women find out they are pregnant, they think about changing how they take their medication, or stopping their medication altogether. However, it is important to talk with your healthcare providers before making any changes to how you take your medication. Your healthcare providers can talk with you about the benefits of treating your condition and the risks of untreated illness during pregnancy.

I take clonidine. Can it make it harder for me to get pregnant?

It is not known if clonidine can make it harder to get pregnant. One study suggests the use of clonidine may increase the chance of pregnancy in women with polyendocrine metabolic ovarian syndrome (PMOS) (PMOS is the new name for polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS).

Does taking clonidine increase the chance of miscarriage?

Miscarriage is common and can occur in any pregnancy for many different reasons. It is not known if clonidine can increase the chance of miscarriage.

Does taking clonidine increase the chance of birth defects?

Birth defects can happen in any pregnancy for different reasons. Out of all babies born each year, about 3 out of 100 (3%) will have a birth defect. We look at research studies to try to understand if an exposure, like clonidine, might increase the chance of birth defects in a pregnancy. The use of clonidine in pregnancy is not expected to increase the chance of birth defects.

Does taking clonidine in pregnancy increase the chance of other pregnancy-related problems?

It is not known if clonidine can increase the chance of other pregnancy-related problems, such as preterm delivery (birth before week 37) or low birth weight (weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces [about 2,500 grams] at birth).

One report that suggests that clonidine use might lead to a slower heart rate in the pregnant woman, leading to lower birth weight in the baby. In cases where clonidine was being used to treat high blood pressure, blood pressure issues might have played a role in the reduced weight of the baby.

I need to take clonidine during my pregnancy. Will it cause withdrawal symptoms in my baby after birth?

The use of clonidine during pregnancy can cause temporary symptoms in newborns soon after birth. These symptoms are sometimes referred to as withdrawal. Symptoms might include high or low blood pressure, drowsiness, and irritability. Most of the time the symptoms go away on their own, usually within a few weeks. Not all babies exposed to clonidine will have these symptoms. It is important that your healthcare providers know you are taking clonidine so that if symptoms happen, your baby can get the care that is best for them.

Does taking clonidine in pregnancy affect future behavior or learning for the child?

It is not known if clonidine can increase the chance of behavior or learning issues in children. One older study noted that children exposed to clonidine during pregnancy showed higher rates of hyperactivity and sleep disturbances compared to a control group. Because clonidine is also used to treat conditions such as ADHD, if a child who was exposed to clonidine during pregnancy is later diagnosed with ADHD, it can be hard to determine

whether this is related to the medication, to underlying familial or genetic issues, or other factors.

Breastfeeding while taking clonidine:

Clonidine passes into breastmilk in small amounts. There are case reports of infants exposed to clonidine through breast milk who did not have any reported side effects. There is 1 report that described a newborn baby who was drowsy, floppy (poor muscle control), had periods of not breathing, and possible seizure activity. These symptoms started soon after delivery and went away when breastfeeding was stopped, days after birth. It is not known if the symptoms were due to pregnancy exposure to clonidine, breastfeeding while taking clonidine, or other reasons.

Taking clonidine might lower milk supply. If you notice your milk supply is lower than usual, talk with your baby's pediatrician or a lactation consultant.

If you suspect the baby has any symptoms (such as being more sleepy than usual, poor muscle control, breathing problems, or seizures) contact the child's healthcare provider. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all your breastfeeding questions.

If a man takes clonidine, could it affect his fertility or increase the chance of birth defects?

Trouble with getting and keeping an erection (impotence, a form of erectile dysfunction) has been reported in some men with high blood pressure being treated with clonidine. Also, one report suggests that clonidine may block or change the effects of the hormone progesterone on sperm. This can affect the ability to conceive a pregnancy. In general, exposures that men have are unlikely to increase risks to a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet Paternal Exposures at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/.

Please click here for references.

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